

Iraqi EFL University Students' Performance of Articles: A Phono-syntactic Study

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Abstract

Writing or uttering a statement like the following "College demands change" seems, to most speakers and learners, to be grammatically unacceptable and vague. The absence of words like (a, the, this) is the main reason of this ambiguity. The addition of an indefinite article (a) can make this statement valid, or at least, acceptable for them. Speakers always seek for making their utterances clear and understood by listeners and readers. This is usually done by adding certain words that make their utterances or phrases clear. The word (house) , for instance, has an indefinite reference in the following Noun Phrase (NP):

1-A house

In some other NPs, it may have a more definite one as in:

2-The white house, my house, that house, the big house, etc.

The words in italics are the main cause behind this clarity and definiteness. Such words are called "Determiners" due to the function they perform, i.e. determining the head word (noun) which they precede. Determiners play a central role in languages in that they make NPs have a definite or indefinite reference. Due to the important role Determiners play, the present research has come into existence to tackle them focusing on how Advanced Iraqi Learners (AILs) of English can recognize and use them in forming various NPs. Due to the various types and great number of Determiners, special emphasis will be given here to definite and indefinite articles since they represent the focus of this research. Some of their essential uses will be tested to find out the difficulties AILs face concerning their recognition and production. As teachers, the researchers have themselves traced this difficulty. A two-part test has been built for this purpose, and the responses have statistically been treated to come to scientifically accurate results.

Key words: *Determiners, NP, Articles, Generic and Specific Reference,*

1.1 Introduction

An NP has a crucial role in forming sentences. It has a noun which is referred to as the Head Word (HW) and the latter can be preceded and/or followed by a number of other words that help identify its reference. This latter role i.e. that of identifying the HW reference, is played by Determiners.

A determiner is a word that identifies the reference-type of the whole NP. Quirk et al.(1980:253) declare that an NP may have a definite or indefinite reference just by adding a definite or indefinite article as in the following two examples respectively:

1-*The* onion , an onion

The existence of the definite article or that of the indefinite one is what gives the type of reference to the NP. Determiners in general described as being "... functional elements of structure and not formal words" due to the adjectival nature that some determiners have. (Oxford Dictionary of English Grammar, 1994).

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Not only can determiners identify the type of reference of an NP, they may also express quantity or number. Crystal (2008:140) states that the main role determiners play is "... to co-occur with nouns to express a wide range of semantic contrast, such as quantity or number". Other linguists extend the range of determiners to include Adjectives and any other word that help determine the reference-type of the NP as in (ibid.):

2-strong man, unseen object,...etc.

Stageberg (1981:173) focuses on those determiners that occur just before the HW. He states that it is "... a word that patterns with a noun. It precedes the noun and serves as a signal that a noun is soon to follow". Such determiners as (the, a, an, all, my, any,...etc.) precede other modifiers such as Adjectives as in:

3-The old man, my new white car

Articles belong to what is known as "closed-class items" that precede the HW. The HW may be preceded by certain modifiers and followed by others. The former are called "Pre-head modifiers" whereas the latter are called "Post-head modifiers" as shown in the following figure (1):

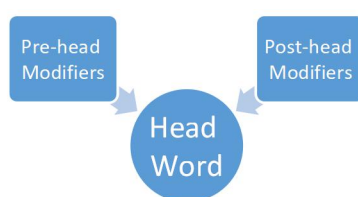


Figure (1) NP Structure

Whether pre or post-head modifiers, all determiners help clarify and determine this HW (Alexander,1988:55). Due to their placement as pre-head modifiers, determiners are divided into three main types which are:

a-Pre-determiners b-Central determiners, and c-Post determiners They are represented by single-word modifiers as stated before. Post H modifiers, on the other hand, are represented by word-group modifiers such as relative clauses, prepositional phrases modifiers. Both types have affixed order of arrangement. What should be noticed here is that a single word modifier can never be placed after the HW. The following NPs are unacceptable:

*4-house *the*, boy *clever*, students *many* The following NPs can't be found:

*5-on *the desk* the book, *that he's made* the decision

1.2 Pre-head determiners

As mentioned earlier, these determiners precede the HW. They are divided into three parts via their occurrence before the HW. These three parts are as follows: pre-determiners, central determiners and post ones. Due to the limitation of time and since the main concern in this research is to investigate the difficulties that most AILs face in tackling articles, which belong to Central Determiners.

1.2.1 Mid or Central Determiners

As stated earlier, central determiners occupy a mid-position between pre and post ones which all precede the HW. They are represented by the following determiners (Quirk et al.,1980:256) and (Foley and Hall, 2003:272) :

a-Definite and indefinite articles (*the, a, an*), Demonstratives (*this, that, these, those*), Possessive pronouns (*my, his, their,...etc.*),(*which or what +ever*), (*what, which and whose as interrogative words*) and (*either and neither*).

The focus in this research, as stated earlier, will be on definite and indefinite articles. So all the other central determiners will not be focused on.

The great majority of central determiners makes them a great source of difficulty for AILs who may, for instance, unconsciously use an incorrect one as in :

*6-Do you like this music or that one? I don't like *either* music.

*7-Do they want to play *a* chess?

An essential characteristic of articles is that, unlike Adjectives, they are "mutually exclusive" which means that they can't be used one after another in the same NP. So it is incorrect to say:

*8-The a car....., *- An a book.

One article should be used in the structure of the NP. So an NP like the following can easily be noticed:

9-The car, an orange, a year

In this respect, articles, or determiners in general, differ from Adjectives which can be used one after the other before the HW as in:

10-The new white car...., My big green bag.....

(www.grammar.collinsdictionary.com/easy-learning)

Articles are tackled in relation to the HW that follows them. Depending on Quirk et al. Model, the HW may have one of the following types (singular count, plural count and non-count nouns).. As far as articles are concerned, definite article, in addition to (possessive pronouns, whatever, and whichever, interrogative what, which, whose, and negative no) can occur before all three previous types of nouns, as shown in the following examples (Quirk et al., 1985:256):

11-the book, the books, the air

The relation of the above stated determiners to the three types of nouns is shown in Figure (2) below which is entitled (Type 1):

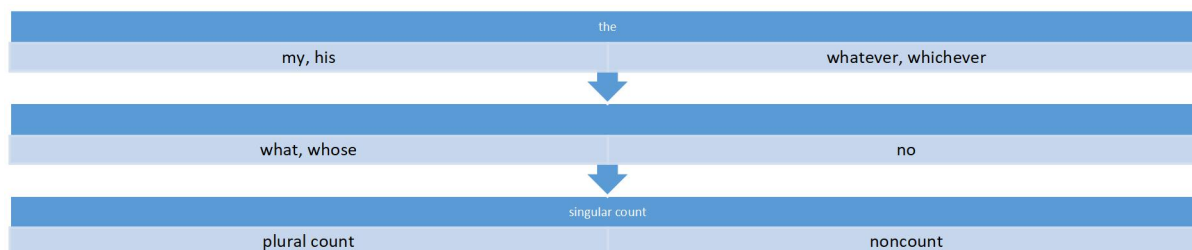


Figure (2): Association of Type (1)

The other type adopted from this Model is that which associates between singular count nouns and some determiners. Indefinite articles (a, an) can be used here in this type as in (Quirk et al.,1980:257):

12-I have a car, an old man, a long path

A third type is noticed with plural count and non-count nouns. Here, two determiners can be used before such nouns. Determiners that can be used here are: *zero article* (with proper nouns, nouns that are used generically), *some* "as an assertive one" and *any* as nonassertive, and *enough* as a quantitative determiner. They can be shown in the following examples respectively (Foley and Hall, 2003:273):

13-Cows eat grass.

14-They wanted some books, milk.

Figure (3) shows the above stated relation:

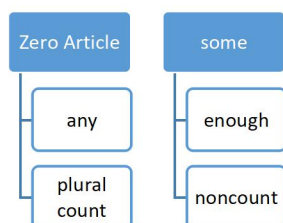


Figure (3) Type (3)

1.2.2. Initial Position Determiners

The title refers to those determiners that occupy the first slot in the structure of the NP, in some other words, nothing can precede them. They come before central determiners. Pre-determiners consist of: (*all, both, half, double, twice, three times, one-fifth, such* and *what* in exclamation). Like central ones, pre-determiners are also "mutually exclusive" as in:

*15-All both students....

"all, both and half" can precede the articles (a, an, the), possessive pronouns or demonstratives (Chalker,1984:73):

1.2.3 Post Determiners

The last pre-Head modifiers that precede the Adjective and the HW are the post determiners such as "Cardinal numerals, Ordinal numerals, Closed-class quantifiers and Open-class quantifiers". They also have co-occurrence with nouns depending on their type.

1.3 Definite and Indefinite Articles

It is believed that, in most cases, writing a sentence in English requires the use of an article whether definite or indefinite. Articles help clarify or specify the reference of the noun they precede. They are "mutually exclusive", i.e. we can't use more than one in the same structure. Quirk's Model for determining the type of articles used with reference to the noun they determine will be adopted in this research.

1.3.1 Form

Phonologically speaking, articles belong to what is called weak forms. The latter term refers to those forms that have a weak vowel, namely schwa /ə/. The definite article, (the), has two weak forms depending on the sound that immediately comes after it. Thus, it is pronounced as /ðə/ if the noun that comes after it begins with a consonant sound as in (Roach,2009:90):

16-The boy / ðə bɔi/ , the rat / ðə ræt/

But it is pronounced as /ði/ in case there is a vowel after it as in:

17-The aim / ði eim/ , the apple / ði ʌpl/

In their pronunciation, most AILs unconsciously pronounce (the) as / ðə/ in all situations regardless of what comes after it.

A third pronunciation is added that is the strong form of (the). Eckersley and Eckersley (1980:51) state that in case of emphasis, this article has the following strong form /ði:/, though it is rarely used :

18a-"He was one of the first persons, if not **the** first person to drive a car."

18b-"I was told you were Mr. Crosby; are you **the** Mr. Crosby?"

Indefinite articles, on the other hand, are also weak. (a) is pronounced as schwa /ə/ and is used before singular countable nouns that begin with a consonant. (an), on the other hand, is pronounced as /ən/ before those that begin with a vowel sound as in (ibid.):

19-a book /ə bʊk/ , a man / ə mæn/ , an aim / ən eim/, an onion / ən ʌni ən/

The first problem encountered here is with those nouns that start with silent letters. Some AILs face such a difficulty with words like (hour, European, university) since "...it is the pronunciation which matters, not the spelling of the word". Accordingly, the indefinite article that should be used with the previous nouns are as follows:

20- An **h**our , a **E**uropean , a **u**niversity , an umbrella

1.3.2 Existence or Non-existence of an Article

Indefinite articles acquire their concept from the indefiniteness that they offer to the nouns following them. Specialists distinguish between being indefinite and specific indefinite. To clarify this, look at the following two examples:

21-Jean wants to marry a footballer.

22-Jean's married to a footballer.

The first example indicates that *Jean* wants to marry any footballer (an indefinite one) that cannot be specified. Thus it has an indefinite reference. Moving to the second example, it is noticed that though the noun is also an indefinite one, it is "...known, particular...whose identity is not being disclosed". (Crystal, 2008:241,444).

Determining whether or not to use a definite or indefinite articles mainly depends on the noun-type that follows. As stated earlier, nouns can be classified into singular count, plural count and non-count ones. Such classification determines which type of articles should be used.(Kolln, 1994).

Since the cases in which a definite or an indefinite article is used or not are so numerous and thorny, some of these essential cases will be tackled here focusing on those that are employed in the practical part of the research. They can be summarized as follows:

1-An indefinite article is used before a singular countable noun mentioned for the first time, but if it is mentioned later, the definite article should be used as in (Murphy,2012:144):

23-I have met *a man*. *The man* was wearing a blue shirt.

Indefinite articles can't be used before plural, uncountable, abstract nouns and names of meals as in the following examples respectively:

24-boys, milk, beauty, lunch.

But again if such nouns are specified by (of-construction), they can be preceded by (the) as stated before:

25-The beauty of this scene, the milk in this bottle,...

2-It is also used before a noun representing "an example of a class of things", whereas *the* is used to refer to the whole class as in the following examples respectively:

26-A date palm is usually long.

27-The Indian tiger has bigger ears than the African one.

3-With jobs or professions, nationalities and beliefs, and some numerical expressions, the indefinite article is preferable rather than the definite one (except in cases of specificity) as in:

28- He is a bank manager. John is an Australian, a Muslim. *But:*

28a-He is the manager of this bank. (*specific manager*)

4-Before prices and speeds, and words like school, church, prison, (when they are used as general building) the indefinite article is also used:

29-Two thousand IDs. a kilo. 110 kilometers an hour.

30-Is there a school, a hospital, a church in this town?

But thinking of the general use or purpose which these words are used for requires the use of a zero article as in (Murphy,2012:148):

31-The guilty were sent to prison.

Foley and Hall (2003:273) state that using the indefinite article before an abstract noun can just be made in case that it is required to make this noun more specific as in:

32-*The dream* of being a dentist is fascinating.

5- Indefinite articles can also be used before abbreviations. Attention here must be paid to the pronunciation of the first letter in the abbreviation regardless of its being a consonant or a vowel sound since it is the pronunciation that determines which article should be used. The abbreviation (FCC), for instance, should be preceded by the indefinite article (an) since the first letter (F) is pronounced as /ef/ though it is a consonant sound.(<https://www.aje.com/arc/editing-tip-indefinite-article-use-abbreviations>).

6-The Definite article, rather than the indefinite ones, is used before unique things like (The earth, the moon, the sun), and before superlatives:

33-The strongest boy in the field...., They are the best of friends.

It is worth mentioning here that the use of (the) before Adjectives with no nouns to follow will turn these Adjectives into plural nouns as in:

34-The good are, the rich help the poor.

What is more is that in case there is no noun to follow, (the) should never be used as in (Al-Wahab et al.,1990: 16):

35-She knows best.

7-(the) can also be used before musical instruments in general as in:

36-Can you play the lute, the piano, the guitar?...

here a reference is made for "the general ability to play any piano, not just a specific one". But with the general use, the indefinite articles are used (Eastwood, 2005:201):

37-I play guitar in a band.

38-Is there a piano among these musical instruments?

8- (the) can also be used before (names of rivers, chains of mountains, groups of islands, a name of a country that is a union of smaller entities, names of ships, hotels, countries that are plural in form, before a common noun followed by a proper noun, before dozen, hundred, thousand) as in:

39-The United Kingdom. The USA.

9- Definite or Indefinite articles should not be used before nouns, whether countable or uncountable, when they are used in a general sense such as:

40-Books are my best friends. (*all books*)

3-They are also not used before the names of countries, proper nouns, names of cities, capitals, countries, materials, political or business roles, transports, substances). (Foley and Hall,2003:273):

41-She lives in England

As stated earlier, it is the context or the intention behind what a speaker what to say that determines whether or not to use an article as can be noticed in the following:

42- I love music.

42a-The music in this hall is fascinating.

1.3.2.1 Generic vs Specific Reference

Crystal (2008:209) declares that generic "refers to a whole class of entities rather than to individual members". Specific, on the other hand, refers to someone or something in particular. It is a well-known fact that deciding which article to use depends on what we want to say and what reference we give to the noun which we employ. Accordingly, a noun which may be preceded by an indefinite article, may in some other places, be preceded by the definite one.

Quirk and Greenbaum (1973:67-8) distinguish between making a specific or generic reference in saying that if the speaker refers to something in his/her mind, then there is what is called a specific reference as in the following example:

43-A sparrow and three doves are in this cage.

Here, there is a specific sparrow that the speaker talks about. But in saying:

44-Sparrows are brown or grey birds. (*Generic Reference, all sparrows*)

Generic reference can be expressed in two different ways that are determined by the use of definite or indefinite articles. Examples the following:

45-A tiger has no mane

45a-The tiger has no mane.

It is understood that in (45) a generic reference is made with the indefinite singular, whereas in (45a) the noun modified, i.e. tiger, refers to tigers in general, not a specific one. Removing the definite article in the following example:

46-Tigers have no mane.

Indicates a "generic use of the indefinite plural form". (Leech and Svartvik, 1994:53). Generic reference can be indicated by the definite or indefinite article and without any of them as well.

To decide which and how to choose an article or not, learners should pay close attention to the noun that follows and its type and status, i.e. whether it is proper, common, indefinite, singular or plural,...etc. (<https://writingcenter.gmu.edu/guides/definite-and-indefinite-articles>):

Most AILs of English may suffer from the use of definite and indefinite articles. The choice of the proper article seems to be a challenging aspect in writing in English. They may misuse an article, delete a necessary one or add an unnecessary one as it will be seen in the experimental part of this research.

Part Two: Practical Aspect

Learning a certain activity depends mainly on practice that shows whether or not the learners have acquired this activity, what kinds of difficulties they may face, which aspect is easy or difficult. Teachers have to make tests from time to time to appreciate their students' progress as well as identifying the types of errors they may commit.

The learners' use of definite and indefinite articles in writing is described as being a challenging process. AILs are among those learners who suffer a lot from such a use. Conducting tests is one of the essential means that can show the areas from which those learners suffer. (Cunningsworth, 1984:55).

2.1 The Test

Most AILs of English face great difficulties in handling articles. Most of these difficulties stem from various reasons such as mother-tongue interference, incomplete learning process, overgeneralization strategies they apply and incorrect application of rules and so on.

A two-fold test has been conducted here. The first one is related to AILs' recognition and the other to their production concerning articles. Both parts have one aim, i.e. showing the difficult aspects which AILs of English suffer from in dealing with articles.

As far as the first part is concerned, recognition test, an MCQ consisting of (34) items has been given to the examinees. These research targets, listed above, have randomly been arranged in this part to test students' recognition concerning definite and indefinite articles. The following aspects (or research targets) concerning whether or not the articles are used in relation to noun-types will be focused on in this test:

(A-Singular count B-Plural count C-Non-count Nouns

D-Words that begin with silent letters E-words that begin with a vowel sound. F-Words that begin with a consonant G-Vowels that are pronounced as Consonants. H-First mentioned nouns and second mentioned ones. I-Generic Reference. J- Specific Reference. K-Indefinite Reference. L-Certain words like (hospital, President, King, Church, Prison, names of materials, illness,...) M-Before Seasons and musical instruments N-Before Adjectives O-Before Abbreviations, and P-The different pronunciations of (the) as/ði/, /ðə/. Table (1) below shows the distribution of test items among these aspects or research targets in the Recognition test.

Two items are given to each of the aspects that are thought to be problematic, except aspect (L) which has been represented by four items due to the great number of such words. They are randomly arranged. As far as the scoring scheme is concerned, each correct choice is given one mark whereas the incorrect one is given zero.

Test validity and reliability are the two crucial criteria that should be made sure of before conducting any test. A test is valid if it tests what is conducted to test. The present test is valid since it has one basic aspect to measure, i.e. the use of articles by AILs of English to find out the difficulties they face in tackling these articles. Since the test has accurately identified aspect to measure, and it will yield the same results if it is conducted later by any other researcher, the test can be regarded as being reliable. (<https://allpsych.com/research-methods/variablesvalidityreliability/validityreliability/>)

2.2 The Study Sample

First-Year students-Dept. of English at Al-Mansour University College have been chosen to be the sample of this research. (42) students have randomly be chosen. Both parts of the test have online been held on the 9th of May, 2020, and half an hour is given as a rest between the two parts, i.e. recognition and production.

2.3 Recognition Test

As stated earlier, the previously mentioned aspects or research targets have randomly been arranged within this part. Each target has been repeated twice. It is worth mentioning here that some items may belong to more than one aspect, and are distributed as follows in table No.(1) below. The item that begins with a consonant sound, for instance, may also indicates a generic reference as can be noticed in item No. (17). (See Appendix A).

Table (1)

Distribution of items in Recognition test

Aspects	Items No.	Aspects	Items No.
A- Singular count	3, 17	I- Generic Reference and zero article	2, 16
B-Plural Count	5, 19	J- Specific Reference	12, 33
C- Non-count Nouns	7, 21	K- Indefinite Reference	14,13
D- Word that begin with silent letters	9, 23	L- Certain words like (hospital, leader, King, names of materials, illness,...)	10, 27, 29, 30, 34
E- words that begin with a vowel sound	11, 26	M- Seasons and Musical instruments	8, 25
F- Words that begin with a consonant	17, 28	N- Before Adjectives	6, 22
G- Vowels that are pronounced as Consonants	15, 20	O- Before Abbreviations	4, 31
H- First mentioned nouns and second mentioned ones	24, 32	P- The different pronunciations of (the) as/ði/ and /ðə/.	1, 18

Having been collected, the items are corrected on a right/ wrong basis. Each correctly answered item is given one mark. Thus the whole question is given (34) marks. It can be said that the test is valid since it measures what's supposed to measure.

2.3.1 Difficulty Level

Difficulty level (DL) of test items is obtained by dividing the total number of correct responses by the total number of responses (Gronlund, 1981:267). (42) students are given a question of (34) items. As a result, the total number of responses is (1428). The number of correct ones has been (616) responses. Accordingly, the DL of the whole items is (0.431).

The DL of each test item is obtained by dividing the number of students who have correctly answered the item by the total number of students. A look at Table (2) reveals that items related to aspects (A, E, H, M) have been the easiest aspects for the students. Other items such as in (C, D, G, I, K, L, N, O, P) have been tackled with a great difficulty.

Table (2)

Difficulty Level of Test Items

Item No.	Correct Responses	DL	Item No.	Correct Responses	DL	Item No.	Correct Responses	DL
1	15	0.357	13	17	0.404	25	21	0.5
2	20	0.476	14	18	0.428	26	33	0.785
3	31	0.738	15	14	0.333	27	9	0.214
4	9	0.214	16	18	0.428	28	21	0.5
5	27	0.642	17	24	0.571	29	9	0.214
6	17	0.404	18	27	0.642	30	15	0.357
7	4	0.095	19	19	0.452	31	11	0.261
8	31	0.738	20	20	0.476	32	31	0.738
9	16	0.380	21	8	0.190	33	17	0.404
10	7	0.166	22	12	0.285	34	7	0.166
11	25	0.595	23	24	0.571			
12	20	0.476	24	31	0.738			

The DL of each aspect is calculated by combining the correct responses of its two items. Such DL percentages show that the most problematic aspects concerning the use of definite and indefinite articles have been those related to the aspects (C, G, N, and P). Item No. (7) which is related to the use of articles before a non-count noun, for instance, has correctly responded to by (4) students only, and the second item, i.e. No. (21) of the same aspect has got (8) correct responses only. Table (3) shows the DL of the whole aspects tested here let alone their scores. It shows that some aspects have got less than (20) namely the

Table (3)

Correct Responses, Scores and Difficult Level

Aspect	Total Responses	Correct Responses	Scores Obtained	DL	Aspect	Total Responses	Correct Responses	Scores Obtained	DL
A	84	58	58	0.690	I	84	39	39	0.336
B	84	56	56	0.482	J	84	41	41	0.353
C	84	12	12	0.103	K	84	35	35	0.301
D	84	40	40	0.344	L	168	38	38	0.163
E	84	58	58	0.5	M	84	59	59	0.508
F	84	48	48	0.413	N	84	29	29	0.25
G	84	34	34	0.293	O	84	20	20	0.238
H	84	78	78	0.663	P	84	35	35	0.301

aspects (C and L) that are concerned with (Non-count nouns and the use before words like hospital, school prison and so on) respectively. Other aspects have got a high DL such as those in (H, M, E, B, F, J), a matter that reflects a great recognition sense of most students tested. For more clarification, chart (1) shows the DL of all aspects in this test:

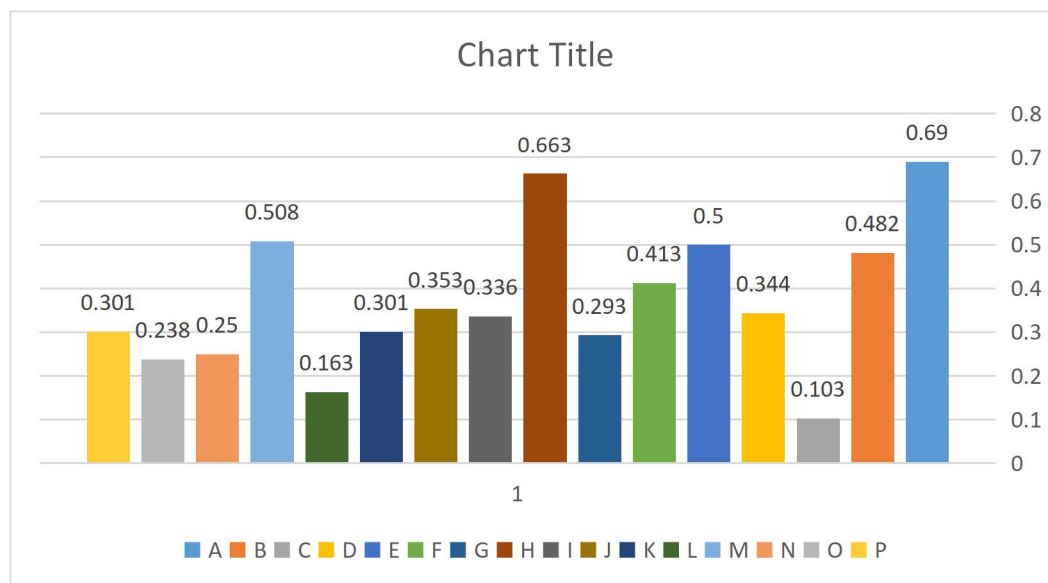


Chart (1): DL of Test Aspects in Recognition Test

2.4 Production Test

The aim behind this part is to show the full knowledge and awareness of the students under study concerning the use of articles. In this part, they are not given options to choose from, instead, they will manipulate their own knowledge to complete the sentences given.

Having been given a rest for half an hour, the same (42) students have been employed in the second part of the test, i.e. production test. The latter consists on (35) items that focus on the same essential aspects tested before. Each aspect is represented by two items except that referred to by the letter (L), it is represented by four items to cover more than one word included in it. The students are ordered to fill the blanks with the suitable article, and to transcribe the definite article in two of the given items. It is worth mentioning here that some items contain two blanks to be filled, but since the focus is on a certain aspect represented by one blank, then the other one won't be focused on. (See Appendix B).

The right-wrong basis has been used in the correction process. The correct response is given (2 marks) whereas the incorrect one is given zero. The total number of responses is (1470) and only (516) of them have been scored right. Thus the DL of this part is (0.351). Turning to the DL of each item, it is found that it ranges from (0) to (0.928) as shown in Table (4) below. It shows that some items have been so difficult

Table (4)

Correct Responses and DL of Each Item in Production Test

Item No.	Correct Responses	DL	Item No.	Correct Responses	DL	Item No.	Correct Responses	DL
1	28	0.666	13	3	0.071	25	28	0.666
2	0	0	14	3	0.071	26	39	0.928
3	9	0.214	15	12	0.285	27	19	0.452
4	34	0.809	16	12	0.285	28	28	0.666
5	10	0.238	17	34	0.809	29	30	0.714
6	0	0	18	11	0.261	30	11	0.261
7	7	0.166	19	29	0.690	31	13	0.309
8	14	0.333	20	10	0.238	32	13	0.309

9	9	0.214	21	27	0.642	33	23	0.547
10	19	0.452	22	10	0.238	34	23	0.547
11	0	0	23	15	0.357	35	19	0.452
12	12	0.285	24	3	0.071			

to tackle such as (2, 6, 11, 13, 14, 12, 9,...), whereas others have been easy like (4, 17, 26, 29). Combining the items of each aspect in this test shows us the correct responses each aspect has got and the DL of each one as well. This is done by doubling the correct responses of the two items and doubling the number of participants. A look at Table (5) below:

Table (5)
Correct Responses and DL of each Aspect in the Production Test

Aspect	No. of Items in the Test	No. of Correct Responses	DL	Aspect	No. of Items	No. of Correct Responses	DL
A	17, 32	47	0.559	I	6,20	10	0.119
B	34, 28	49	0.583	J	7,12	18	0.214
C	2, 9	10	0.119	K	4,14	37	0.440
D	10, 33	42	0.5	L	3,11,13,23	27	0.210
E	1, 8	32	0.380	M	25,27	56	0.666
F	30, 35	30	0.357	N	16,31	25	0.297
G	24,26	31	0.369	O	5,15	22	0.261
H	19,29	59	0.702	P	18,22	21	0.25

reveals that the DL ranges from (0.119) to (702). It is stated earlier that to obtain a good spread of results, the DL should range from (20) to (80). Aspects like (C, I, J, P, and L) have been proved to be the most difficult ones which most AILs suffer from. What is striking in this test is that some participants are fluctuated in their responses concerning the items of each aspect. To prove this, there is a great gap between the items No. (24 and 26) that represent aspect (G), i.e. Vowels that are pronounced like consonants, since the former has been correctly responded to by 3 participants only whereas the latter by 28 ones.

Comparing the responses DL and percentages in both parts of the test shows that there is a crucial gap between them as shown in table (6) and Chart (2) below. Most AILs have shown great difficulty and could not employ their full knowledge in tackling the production test items.

Table (6)
Correct Responses, Difficulty Level and Percentage of the Items in Both Tests

Test	Total No. of responses	No. of correct responses	Difficulty level	Percentage
Recognition Test	1428	616	0.431	43.13%
Production Test	1470	516	0.351	35.10%

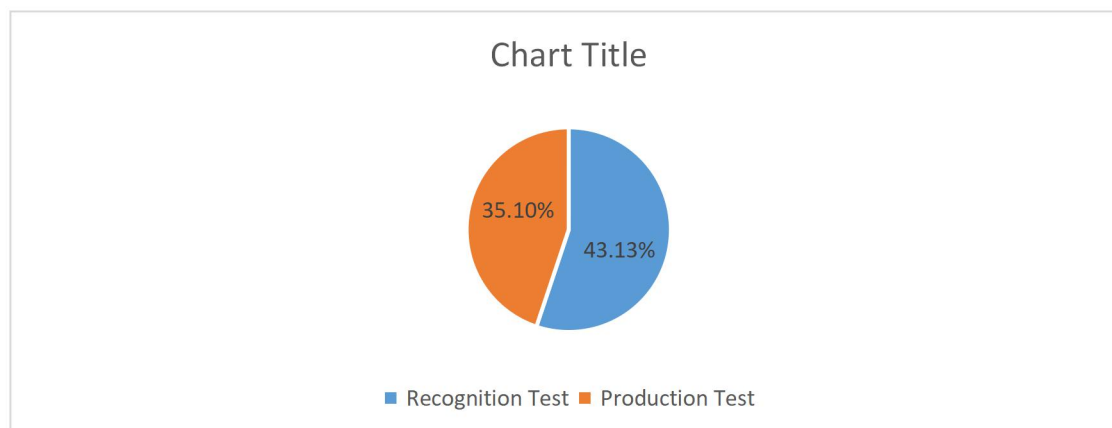


Chart 2: Percentages of Responses in Both Tests

2.5 Results Analysis

Articles have been described as being a thorny area to deal with by language learners due to their various interfused usages. Some of these essential usages have been tackled in this research. Table (6) can clearly show that most AILs have great difficulty in dealing with articles or some of their usages as can be noticed in the percentage of each test above. Production test has been much more difficult than the Recognition one. Giving options to examinees may facilitate the process of choosing which either be done by guessing or depending on a real knowledge.

Comparing the DL and percentages of each aspect in both tests can show that some aspects have the same difficulty in both parts, others are not. A look at Table (7) below shows that most AILs have great difficulty in dealing with the uses of articles in aspects (C, I, J, L, N, O, and P, and some other aspects).

Table (7)

DL and Percentages of Aspects in Both Tests

Aspects	Recognition Test		Production Test		Aspects	Recognition Test		Production Test	
	DL	Percentage	DL	Percentage		DL	Percentage	DL	Percentage
A	0.5	69.04%	0.559	55.95%	I	0.336	46.42%	0.119	11.90%
B	0.482	66.66%	0.583	58.33%	J	0.353	48.80%	0.214	21.42%
C	0.103	14.28%	0.119	11.90%	K	0.301	41.66%	0.440	44.04%
D	0.344	47.61%	0.5	50%	L	0.163	22.61%	0.321	16.07%
E	0.5	69.04%	0.380	38.09%	M	0.508	70.23%	0.666	66.66%
F	0.413	57.14%	0.357	35.71%	N	0.25	34.52%	0.297	29.76%
G	0.293	40.47%	0.369	36.90%	O	0.238	23.80%	0.261	26.19%
H	0.663	92.85%	0.702	70.23%	P	0.301	41.66%	0.25	25%

Mother-tongue interference has played a central role here. Some AILs are unconsciously affected by Tongue when tackling the test items. They are, for instance, used to add what is called "the definite al" to most, if not all, non-count or abstract nouns. Accordingly, they have unconsciously used the definite article (the) before such nouns as "butter, life, Spring, geometry,..." in items (2, 9, 27, and 30) respectively.(See Appendix B).

This negatively influential factor can also be noticed before plural count nouns that are used generically. Instead of using (zero article), all of the (42) students tested have wrongly used (the) in item No. (6).The same can also be noticed with item No. (2) in which an abstract noun indicates a generic or an indefinite reference .

Only ten of them have been able to add (zero article) before the generic reference of the noun (animals) in item No. (20):

20-..... animals live in groups.

Literally translation of a sentence may create serious mistakes. This can be noticed in items No. (4, and 14). It seems that the former has been literally translated and understood by most students (80.95%) as follows:

-يدرس اخي ليصبح طبيبيا.

which totally acceptable Arabic sentence. As a result those student have added (a) before the word (doctor). But what's striking is that literal translation and superficial understanding has led (92.85%) to wrongly respond to item No. (14) which, as it is thought, is mentally translated as:

-اينما تذهب، فانها تحمّل المنديل (مندیلا) في يدها

Though it seems that the reference here in an indefinite one (*any handkerchief*), those students have taken it to mean (*her specific handkerchief*).

Regardless of this, overgeneralization strategy has a positive effect noticed in Item No. (25) where (29) students have used (the) before musical instruments.

Another misleading aspect noticed here is the generic use of nouns. In such a case, as it's known, articles should not be used before plural nouns that are used generically. More than (88%) have overgeneralized this use and ignored such a rule as can be noticed with items No. (6, 20) in which students have added (the) before these nouns.

How to build a grammatically acceptable NP is the most important question that most students ignore. The structure of (Adj. +Noun) may require the use of a certain determiner " an article for instance", but once the Noun is deleted, the article should never be used. This has been a great source of difficulty for most AILs under study. Items No. (16, and 31) have only correctly responded to by (12, and 13) students respectively:

*16-Tatiana is (a) young. , *31-It is (a) wonderful.

The most crucial influence caused by the incomplete learning process is noticed in the use of an article before words such as (King, President, school, prison, church, hospital, space,...). The use of an article depends on the purpose or meaning intended by the use of these words (as explained before). In other words, if reference is made to these words as general buildings, or for their main purpose. Items No. (3, 11, 13, and 23) have reflected a great misunderstanding and ignorance of such a rule, and they have got the following correct answers respectively (9, 0, 3, and 15).

Item No. (3), for instance, indicates the job that is held by one person only, a matter that most AILs ignore. The same occurs with item No. (11) in which the word (space) is used as a reference to the whole universe, and this requires zero article. What has been done is that they also ignore such a rule and have used (the or a) before it. As a result this item has got (zero) correct answers. This aspect has got the lowest percentage among the other ones in both tests. It has got (16.07%) in production test and (22.61%) in recognition one (putting in mind that this percentage is the result of dividing the number of correct responses by 168), a matter that indicates a serious and crucial problem that should be taken into account by instructors.

The association between the definite article and singular countable noun is sometimes a misleading process. A noun that has an indefinite reference requires the use of (a or an). A miss-leading factor is also that which most AILs depend on in making their choice. It is that of whether the noun begins with a consonant or vowel sound regardless of its type (count or non-count). This can clearly be noticed in items No. (3, 10, 13, 14, 16,...).

The association between articles and the form of abbreviations has also taken part in errors committed. This has greatly influenced their choice of an article before abbreviations. Most AILs have unconsciously treated abbreviations as if they were complete words and ignoring their special treatment. Accordingly, more than (70%) of them have used (a) before the abbreviations (NP, and MP) in Items (5, 15). Students have paid attention to the letter itself rather than its pronunciation, i.e. being a vowel or consonant sound, in abbreviations.

Phonologically speaking, the pronunciation of the definite article has also been problematic for the majority of students tested. It seems that this form of *the* /ðə/ is fixed in their minds and speech. The other form /ði/ can hardly be heard. As a result (10) of the students have been able to correctly transcribe the definite article in the examples give in Items (18, and 22) which forms (255) of the total percentage, though this aspect has got (41.66%) in the first test. This might be due to the guessing strategy that most of them employ namely with the existence of options.

Incomplete learning process and overgeneralization strategy have taken part in the various types of errors committed here concerning the phonological treatment. It is well known that the letters (e, and u) are vowels, and they can be found in numerous words. What has been ignored or unconsciously overgeneralized by AILs under study such letters may also have a Consonant-like pronunciation. Though it begins with the letter (e), the word (ewe), in item No. (24) has a consonant-like onset /j/ /ju:/, a matter that makes most student wrongly respond to. What is striking here is that the other word, i.e. (university) used in the same aspect has got (39) correct answers. This has just one justification that is those students are acquainted with this word rather than with the previous one, and so they don't know the actual pronunciation of it.

Some other aspects tested here, as shown in Chart (3) below have shown high ranges of frequency. Aspects (A, B, H, M,) have frequently been tackled by more than (55%) of the total number of students, though the previously influential strategies have noticed marks here as can be noticed in item No. (27), that belongs to aspect (M). It has been correctly answered by only (19) students (45.23%).

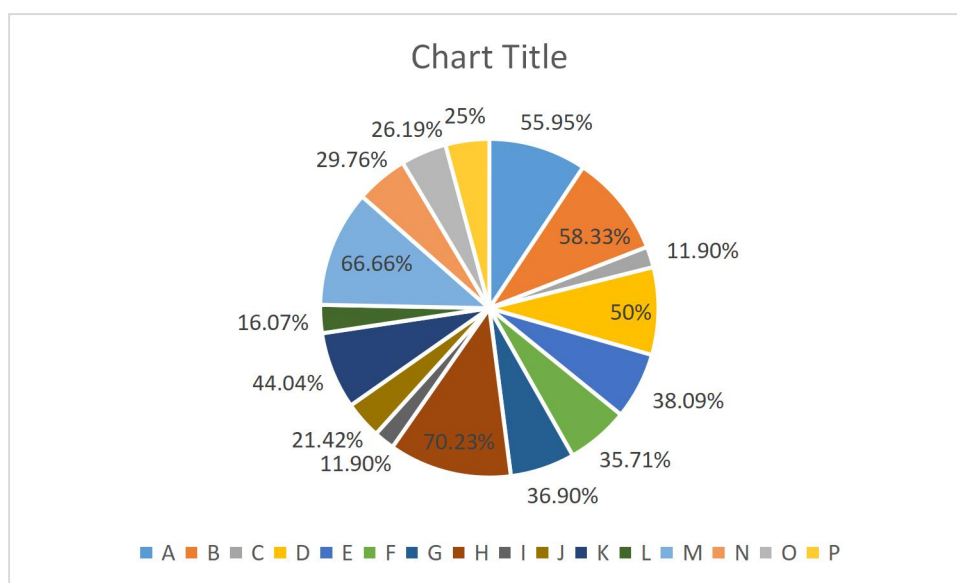


Chart 3: Percentages of Test-Aspects in Production Test

Conclusions

Most instructors believe that articles-subject should not be dealt with any more since they regard it as an archaic subject. But what has been noticed here refutes this viewpoint. Articles represent a thorny and a problematic area for most language learners. Their importance and interfused usages are as important as those of prepositions or any other aspect. What can be inferred out of this research is that:

- 1-Most AILs of English face great difficulties in tackling articles whether in the cases of their usages or not.
- 2-It is useless to superficially deal with cases in which an article is used or not. Nuanced explanation and clarification that are supported by examples should be provided. The uses and their exceptions must also be clarified and tested as well.
- 3-Mother-tongue interference, incomplete learning process, ignorance or misunderstanding of rules and literal translation are the essential sources of error committing.

4-In most cases, if not all, the intended meaning behind the noun used is what determines whether or not an article is used and which one is to be used.

5-English courses reinforce one another. So giving the use of the definite article before a vowel or consonant sound should be accompanied by practices concerning the actual pronunciation of it, i.e. /ði/, /ðə/.

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Appendix A	Appendix B
<p>Recognition Test</p> <p>Q. Choose the right option.</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. I bought a green apple. I gave him ... apple. (/ði/ ,/ ðə/) 2. Ruthless poachers hunt ... elephant for the valuable ivory of its tusks. (a , an, the, X) 3. He wanted to choose ... novel for reading. (a, an, X, the) 4. This belongs to FDA. (a, an, X,) 5. .. books are my best friend.(a, an, X, the) 6. He is Iraqi. (a, an, X, the) 7. I didn't know what to do. So I asked Ali for..... advice.(v) 8. They play guitar.(a, an, X, the) 9. Mike is ... honest man.(a, an, X, the) 10. Tony Blair was elected ... party leader.(a, an, X, the) 11. I found ... umbrella.(a, an, X, the) 12. Do you hear ... noise just now? (a, an, X, the) 13. I would like ... sparkling water with no ... ice, please. (the,X), (a an), (X,X),(the,an) 14. It comes with ... salad. And there is also ... choice of vegetables.(the, the), (a,a), (X,a), (a, the) 15. She has read ... unit.(a, an, X, the) 16. It is impossible to live in this life without ... hope.(a, an, X, the) 17. The police built ... prison in this city.(a, an, X, the) 18. We left ... city.(/ ði/ , / ðə/) 19. I like ... short stories.(the, a, an, X) 20. She is ... European citizen.(the, a, an, X) 21. There is ... blood on your shirt.(the, a, an, X) 22. Liliana is ... Russian.(the, a, an, X) 23. The exam lasts for ... hour.(the, a, an, X) 	<p>Production Test</p> <p>Q1-Insert an article (the, a , an, or X) where necessary:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1-His mother was engineer, and she earns one hundred week. 2-.....geometry set contains ruler, pair of compasses. 3-They made him King. 4-My brother is studying to be doctor. 5-She asks how to make NP. 6-..... children learn from playing. 7-..... milk of this cow has special taste. 8-His father is officer in National Army. 9-..... butter is made of cream. 10-He is regarded as honorable person. 11-There are millions of stars in space. 12-This is behavior that I told you about. 13-They are in church just now for worshipping. 14-Wherever she goes, she carries handkerchief in her hand. 15-He is MP. 16- Tatiana is young. 17-We will be late if we don't take taxi. 18-Transcribe the word (the) in the following: the old man, the dream 19-I bought magazine and Paper. I put Paper on my desk, but I could not remember where I put magazine. 20-..... animals live in groups. 21-They travelled to United Kingdom.

24. ... man and... woman were walking. ... man was tall but ... woman was short.(the, the, a, a), (a, a, the, the), (a,a,a,a), (X, X, the, the)	22-Transcribe the word (the) in the following: the owl, the use
25. He dreams to be shop assistant.(the, a, an, X)	23-Come to dinner with me.
26. He has eaten ... apple.(the, a, an, X)	24-She has got ewe.
27. He was chosen King.(the, a, an, X)	25-Layla plays piano very well..
28. I didn't know how to solve the question.. So I asked for ... help.(the, a, an, X)	26-She isuniversity student.
29. At 6 th year, children go to ... school.(the, a, an, X)	27-..... Spring is my best season.
30. My child is caught by ... typhus.(the, a, an, X)	28-Most people are against aggression.
31. I'm looking for ...FM station.(, a, an, X)	29-Once upon a time, there was boy who lived in cottage. Cottage was in the countryside and boy had lived there all his life.
32. Is there anything for dessert? Yes. There is ... apple pie in the fridge.(the, a, an, X)	30-..... refrigerators have made life easier.
33. I'm looking for ... pen. It's a red one.(the, a, an, X)	31-It is wonderful.
34. The guilty men were sent to ... prison.(the, a, an, X)	32-He goes everywhere by bike. He has not got car.
	33-They stayed here for hour.
	34-..... irregular verbs in French are so difficult.
	35-Since he was poor, he couldn't buy car.